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ABSTRACT

Differences in conditions in the U.S. and one developing country, the Bahamas, suggest that evaluation of higher education programs are more welcome in the latter. U.S. evaluation programs, such as Florida's annual review of selected disciplines in its nine state institutions of higher education, are few in number and have spread only recently, in response to declining resources and increasing demands for accountability. In developing countries, however, there is a critical need for program evaluation, because of these countries' large number of problems, the consequent need for many higher education programs, the lack of models for comparison, the sharp limits on resources and funding, and the need to deal with political pressures for particular programs. An example of a successful evaluation occurred in the Bahamas, where the College of the Bahamas assessed the need for and implementation and outcome of a new program to prepare secondary school dropouts for employment or higher education. The evaluation process included data collection and analysis as well as faculty training in evaluation methods. As expected, college and government officials were very receptive to the program evaluation process. (RW)

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The Potential for Program Evaluation in a "Developing" Country

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association Los Angeles, California, 1981

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the need for a newer and more expanded conception of program evaluation is described. The theme is advanced that conditions are favorable for the implementation of the evaluation process in one of the world's developing countries, the Bahamas, where, it is pointed out, resource limitations and intense need combine to maximize potential gains as well as the likelihood of adherence to procedures. The paper includes a summary of the evaluation strategies the author has employed in the Bahamas and a description of the results with one program.

I. BACKGROUND: Program Evaluation-new directions, old realities

For reasons ranging from declining enrollments and declining revenues to legislative demands for accountability, many institutions of higher education in the United States have begun to implement a process of program review and evaluation. For the purpose of this paper, program evaluation is defined as a systematic and objective examination of the key components of an institution's degree or non-degree offerings. It is wide-ranging enough to include everything from a consideration of the rationale for the offering to its programmatic design and follow-up. The intensity of its implementation and methodology employed depends upon conditions present in the institution and ranges from cursory looks at credit hour productivity all the way to "sunset" clauses which require the development of a convincing rationale for all programs every couple of years to insure continued funding.

The situation in the State of Florida illustrates the purposes and the methodology being employed to implement one kind of program review. The Florida Board of Regents designed a system which would,

> ". . . shift away from reliance on degree productivity criteria as an appropriate measure of program quality and as the sole means of identifying existing programs which may be subjected to an in-depth study for possible discontinuation. The new process of systemwide review is intended to confirm that programs are meeting standards of quality, are being managed efficiently, and are providing a desired service to their regions and the state." (Hill, 1978)

Within the State several academic disciplines are studied intensively each year. Once these programs are identified, each of the nine state institutions of higher education develops responses to specific state questions dealing with issues such as manpower need for the program, professional preparation of program faculty and, among many other concerns, the nature and diversity of instructional activities available within the program. Locally prepared written materials are supplied to a team of outside consultants, jointly selected by the state and the institutions. The consultants, themselves equipped with a set of guidelines provided by the state, then visit each site. The outcome of the process is a set of recommendations issued by the consultants dealing with site specific concerns and system-wide needs as well.

The intent of the various approaches to program review is clear. At a time when money may not be available to continuously fund all possible programs, it appears reasonable to utilize objective information to determine which should be supported at the same level and which are deserving of greater or lesser levels of support. Presumably reviews could serve the purpose of "saving" or revitalizing needed, but floundering programs, or even lead to the initiation of new programs (using saved monies) for an area currently not being served.

Despite the encouraging signs of the emergence of program review as described above, the overall status of evaluation activities at the college level in general

remains at a very low level. As Samuel Ball, Senior Research Psychologist at ETS has noted,

> ". . . the traditional formal educational institutions - the colleges - rarely indulge in program evaluation in any formal sense of that term. It seems that once a program is installed at the college level it becomes sufficient unto itself or 'functionally autonomous' and it is unlikely that any formal effort will occur to gather evidence concerning the need for program modification or continuation" (Ball, 1977)

The foregoing suggests that the review and evaluation process, long dormant in higher education circles, may be rejuvenated in response to new realities. In order to have sustained impact, however, it will first be necessary to overcome long standing obstacles and various other conditional factors including a lack of familiarity with data-based decision making. The remainder of this paper is devoted to consideration of a locale where situational factors vary from what is present in this country. It will be pointed out that in the Bahamas factors such as a critical need for new programmatic offerings, a lack of multiple programs and a severe shortage of resources for program development may serve to increase the likelihood that the program review process could work within its major institution of higher learning. Presented on the pages which follow is a detailed description of the conditions which appear likely to enhance the review process in this developing country and a discussion of the experiences the writer has had in the implementation of the process.

II. PROGRAM REVIEW IN OTHER SETTINGS: New Potential

Is concern for program review warranted in developing countries where often the funds barely exist for the establishment of programs in the first place? Or is program review something appropriately done only by those institutions, and nations, with spare funds available to support it? In short, how likely is it that the benefits derived from the process will be sufficiently favorable in developing countries to justify involvement with it? To begin to address these issues it is worth examining several features of the environment present in developing countries and relate these to the program review process.

First it should be recognized that institutions of higher learning in developing countries have a need for program review data equal to or greater than the need of institutions within "developed" countries for the following reasons:

a. the number of problems in developing countries which may appropriately be addressed by their higher learning institutions is extensive;

b. the environment within which programs operate in developing countries is considerably more flexible than it is in developed countries; and

c. there are fewer higher education based programs currently in operation to serve as models in developing countries than is the case in so-called developed countries.

The above suggests that in developing countries there is an extensive need for new programs which must be

responsive to changing conditions. Further, there is little experience to draw upon and, hence, a greater likelihood that initial attempts may require continuous development and, of course, a system for monitoring progress and problems. The combination of rapid changes and limited experience suggests a strong need for a system of program review.

Secondly, the fact that funding for program initiation and support is so limited in developing countries, leads decision makers in their quest to spend scarce dollars carefully, to an increased appreciation of the kind of information the program review process can provide. This may stand in contrast to the situation in many sections of the United States where, as pointed out above, evaluation considerations have not been of much concern to educators. Only recently, due to funding constraints has this situation even begun to change. Too often evaluation continues to be viewed as a periodic nuisance which at best will result in programs being left alone until the review cycle repeats itself once again. This behavior is not based on any unwillingness to change, or on any organized effort against the data collection and review process. It is rather a recognition that when critical allocation decisions do not have to be made by higher administration, the review process, will probably end up unused, placed on a shelf somewhere. Receptivity to review is not a constant however, and as resource restrictions become evident in American higher education one can

expect significant changes in attitude toward the process.

The current situation in developing countries stands in sharp contrast to the situation described above. In developing countries it is often the case that critical decisions about programs need to be made because the money spent on them could be used in many other ways. These decisions will be made whether hard objective data is or is not available. In such a setting the requirements of program review become no less difficult but may be perceived as being far more preferable than the alternative of basing decisions on something other than the conditions present in the program in question. Findings then tend to be needed in reverse proportion to the monies available for program support. One may conclude that institutions with the severest limits on funds (e.g. those in developing countries) stand to make the greatest use of data generated in the program review process.

Thirdly, because institutions of higher learning in developing countries have the least experience with the program review process itself and the super-structure within which these institutions operate has little, if any, experience with program review and all the problems which accompany it, there is a need for high placed individuals within these institutions to be well trained in the implementation of the program review process and strongly committed to its use. Thus it is recognized

that even under the best of circumstances decision makers will face political pressures to act in ways not always supported by data at their disposal. Training and commitment will both be necessary to overcome the resource and human obstacles which tend to accompany program review wherever and whenever it is attempted. Further, the manager seeking to implement the process can expect that he will have to frequently justify his methodology and explain his results.

The points made above indicate a strong need in developing countries for the kind of data the program review process can provide; a suggestion that limited funding for program support can, if handled properly, result in an increased reliance on program review data; and a reminder that need and likelihood of use are insufficient without training and commitment. These factors were supported by experiences the writer has had as a consultant to the College of the Bahamas in Nassau. The College, with Ford Foundation funding and developmental assistance provided by the Institute of Open Education of Antioch Graduate Center, developed a program to prepare non-secondary school graduates for admission into the College and/or job advancement. A strong needs statement prepared by the College Principal indicated that a significant percentage of the Island's population could benefit from the Program since, until very recently, very few of the nation's citizens had graduated from secondary school.

Working closely with the College Principal a program review model was evolved by the writer with the following components:

a. In-depth training of all faculty involved in the Program to acquaint them with all phases of the program review process and to enable them, by year's end, to take full responsibility for its continuation. At this point, Program faculty are collecting data all consider to be important and they are preparing to write the final report.

b. Introductory seminars on program review were presented to all interested College faculty (25 of total faculty of 60 voluntarily attended) to acquaint them with what was going on in the Program and to discuss the relevance of the process to their own interests.

c. Reviews of progress and problems have been presented on a regular basis to College Administration along with indications of their responsibility for the institutionalization of the process.

d. A comprehensive data collection, review and analysis schema is in place which emphasizes the program development and enhancement capability of the program review process. The Program staff has pursued the review process utilizing a three stage model and, to date, has drawn conclusions in each of these areas as follows:

1. Needs Assessment: The staff sought to learn the extent of the need for their program and likelihood of the need to continue over the short term and the long term. They discovered an alarmingly high dropout rate, which they labeled "epidemic" and they found no programs in existence, or planned, to address the problem.

As a result of this phase of the evaluation, staff generated statistics on the incidence of this behavior (for the first time in the Bahamas) and were able to point out the long term need for changes in schooling opportunities and job requirements to cope with the problem.

2. Program Planning and Implementation: In this phase of their investigation, the staff studied each component of their program to determine how it was operating and whether it was contributing to the resolution of the problems identified in their needs assessments. They discovered that too much emphasis was placed in some areas of their curriculum (math and science) and not enough was paid to others (English and job interview skills). They discovered too that assumptions in program planning they had made about the need for full time study was perhaps not correct. That is, having their program require full time study turned out to eliminate many potential students who could not make that kind of commitment.

They concluded that their tutorial was extremely successful and needed to be expanded. Other useful findings from this phase were derived from interviewing chairmen of various departments of the College of the Bahamas to determine their perceptions of how succesful the special curriculum had been. These interviews enabled the program planners to further mesh their curriculum with college expectations.

A final interesting finding having to do with program implementation was that the nature of the student being attracted into the program went beyond the high school dropout. Thus, the program enrolls high school graduates (as well as dropouts) who lack study skills, or confidence, along with some basic skills needed to succeed in college and employment.

3. Outcome Assessment: In this part of their evaluation work, staff looked critically at how successful they had been in achieving their original objectives. They were particularly interested in learning whether their graduates were able to achieve in the regular courses of the College of the Bahamas, once they were enrolled there, and whether those looking for work were more successful than they would have been if they had not enrolled in the program.

By studying the grade transcripts of their graduates and a comparable group of other weak students, both of which subsequently enrolled in regular college courses, they were able to conclude that their most recent graduates fared better than the other students in college courses. They also noted that their gradutes had a lower dropout rate than students from other programs.

Unfortunately, their studies also revealed that much still needs to be done to change the attitudes of employers, most of whom feel that only college graduates capable of passing special examinations (which happen to be completely unrelated to the requirements of the job) are eligible for employment.

III. SUMMARY

In this paper the author has suggested that certain conditions present in the Bahamas increase the receptivity of program and governmental leaders toward the program evaluation process.

In the evaluation discussed herein, staff and an outside evaluator looked critically at a program designed to meet significant needs of their developing country; namely, what to do about the young people who drop out of high school unequipped for work or further education. Using a multi-stage needs assessment model, conclusions were offered relative to the pervasiveness of the problem, curricula changes needed, and overall impact to date.

The predicted receptivity to the evaluation process on the part of College and governmental officials was, in fact, borne out, leading to the conclusion that the prospects for improved services to clients and for educational development in general in the Bahamas may be quite favorable. The next group to take on are the entrenched employers who continue to deny meaningful work to many qualified applicants.